

only child Erasmus was taken by Vistani
and sold to a vampire. I explained how
Erasmus was made a minion of the night
stalker, and how it was my miserable part to
free him from that fate at the point of a
stake. What I have neglected to illumine
hate before is how I tracked Erasmus's
kidnappers across the land, or how I
"extracted" the whereabouts from them.

In fact, the Vistani took Erasmus with my
own, unwitting permission. They had brought
an extremely ill member of their tribe to me
one evening and insisted that I treat him,
but I was unable to save the young man's
life. In fear of their retribution, I begged
the Vistani to take anything of mine if only
they would withhold their terrifying powers,
of which I knew nothing. To my lasting
astonishment, they chose to surreptitiously
take my son in exchange for their loss! By

For more than three decades now, I have undertaken to investigate and expose creatures of darkness to the purifying light of truth and knowledge. "Hero" I am named in some circles; "sage" and "master hunter" I am called in others. That I have survived countless supernatural assaults is seen as a marvel among my peers; my name is spoken with fear and loathing among my foes.

In truth, this "virtuous" calling began as an obsessive effort to destroy a vampire that murdered my child, and it has become for me a tedious and bleak career. Even as my life of hunting monsters began, I felt the weight of time on my weary shoulders. Today I am a man who has simply lived too long. Like a regretful rich, I find myself inexorably bound to an existence I sought out of madness and, seemingly, must

now endure for all eternity. Of course I shall die, but whether I shall ever rest in my grave haunts my idle thoughts, and torments me in my dreams.

I expect that those who think me a hero will change their minds when they know the whole truth about my life as a hunter of the unnatural. Nevertheless, I must reveal, here and now, that I have been the indirect yet certain cause of many deaths, and the loss of many good friends.

Mistake me not! I do not merely feel sorry for myself. Rather, I come to grips with a devastating realization: I now see that I am the object of a baleful Vistani curse. More tragically, the nature of this hex is such that I have borne the brunt of it; instead, far worse, those who surround me have fallen victim to it!

I have related the tragic story of how my

the time I realized what had occurred,
they were already an hour gone.

Incensed beyond reason, I strapped the
body of the dead young man to my horse
and doggedly followed the Vistani caravan
through the woods, naively allowing the
sun to set before me without seeking shelter
from the night. Shortly after darkness
fell, I was beset by undead that would
have slain me, had not their master - a
lich - intervened and spared my life,
for reasons that I do not completely
understand. He somehow detected me and,
with his powerful magic, took control of
a pack of zombies that wandered in the
forest. He spoke to me through the mouths
of dead things and placed a magic ward
against undead on me, then animated the
dead Vistana and bade it tell me where
I could find its people. Unfortunately

(I say in hindsight) the plan worked. I found the child-stealers, and my unwelcome entourage included a growing horde of voracious undead that could not touch me, thanks to the lich's ward.

When I found the caravan, I threatened to set the zombies on the Vistani unless they returned my dear boy. They replied that he had been sold to the vampire, Baron Trietus. Something inside me snapped. I released the zombies, and the entire tribe was eaten alive.

Yet the story has not ended. Before she died, the leader cursed me, saying "Live you always among monsters, and see everyone you love die beneath their claws!" Even now, so many years later, I can hear her words with painful clarity. A short time later, I found my dear Erasmus made into a vampire. He begged me to end his curse, which I did

with a heavy heart. The darkness had torn him from my loving arms forever, and I foolishly believed that the curse had exacted its deadly toll. I wept until an insatiate desire for vengeance filled the bottomless rift in my heart.